



Senators say Bush changing definition of victory in Iraq

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WASHINGTON - President Bush has changed his mind about what it will take for the United States to claim victory in Iraq, Arkansas senators said Friday after a meeting with the president.

Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., said Bush appeared to back away from his call for democracy in Iraq, as pressure grows for the White House to change its war strategy.

Bush met with Pryor, Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., and about a dozen other senators, both Democrat and Republican, for about an hour in the White House cabinet room.

"I heard him talking about, at this point victory means a functioning government that can provide basic services and security for the country," Pryor said.

"I'm not trying to read too much into the comment, but to me that sounds very different than what it did four years ago when he was talking about democracy in Iraq and having a western-style democracy there," he added.

Bush boarded an aircraft carrier and declared an end to major combat in May 2003, saying Iraq was in "transition from dictator to democracy."

Since then, sectarian violence has escalated and the country's infrastructure is lacking. More than 3,000 U.S. troops have died.

Lincoln said victory is dependent on the Iraqi people, comparing the effort to colonists who fought to establish independence and democracy in America in the late 1700s.

"What we define as a victory depends a great deal on the will of the Iraqi people," Lincoln said. "I think in terms of classifying victory, we have to recognize there's just so much we can do. I don't think we can give them open-ended support."

Bush is expected to announce a new plan for Iraq next week, which could include an immediate increase of at least 20,000 troops.

Meanwhile Friday, the White House announced that Bush was replacing two top generals in the Middle East.

Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also attended Friday's meeting. Pryor said there were an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, all who seemed willing to work with the president on Iraq.

However, the Arkansas senators said they were reluctant to support a troop surge.

"There's got to be evidence that sending more troops is going to have a real effect," Lincoln said.

She said she will seek specific goals for new troops and a set time frame for their deployment.

"I don't support the surge approach unless President Bush will convince me that he has a plan to go with it," Pryor said. "I'm not talking about a general plan with a lot of fluff and it sounds good. I'm talking about a real nuts-and-bolts plan."

Pryor said he didn't hear a plan Friday in a meeting where senators did most of the talking.

"I told the president I feel like right now he has the burden of proof," Pryor said. "He has to show the American people and has to show Congress that what he's going to do makes sense."

Both said the prolonged conflict is causing anxiety among Americans, many of whom have family members or friends who have been deployed.

Voters displayed their worry at the ballot box and returned power in Congress to Democrats. Any new war plans or additional spending will undergo tighter scrutiny on Capitol Hill as a result, Lincoln said.

The Pentagon is expected to request \$100 billion soon for continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Though neither senator favored slashing the war appropriation, they said they expected a debate in Congress about including money for the war in an annual budget. Currently, it is considered as a supplemental appropriation outside the budget.

Pryor said the "possibility is there" that Congress may cut spending, much like during the Vietnam War, if the conflict in Iraq continues.

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